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The Pakistani Tragedy

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# PAKISTAN FORUM

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## The Pakistani Tragedy

Recently our country suffered the greatest natural disaster of this century—a disaster which may have claimed over a million lives, caused starvation, disease, and destitution to about three million survivors, and destroyed crops and property worth a colosal amount which is yet to be estimated. While we can speculate on the number of lives lost and estimate property damage, we cannot grasp the extent of human suffering which was brought about by this catastrophe. Many stories and novels will be written to depict the misery and suffering of the cyclone victims, but it is doubtful that any fiction will rise to a level of imagery that would match the grimness of the fact.

While the damage done to the soul may never be repaired, the physical damage can be and must be repaired. While the humanity all around the globe was moved by this tragedy and rushed relief supplies at once, the inefficiency and neglect of our Government was of such a magnitude that it could not even handle these supplies, let alone providing succour itself. General Yahya has angrily denounced his critics and the Government's operations have at last improved considerably, but will the Government care to answer why the warning published in the papers of November 11 was not relayed to the people in the affected areas, why there was only one helicopter in East Pakistan, why it took her five days to declare a calamity, and why bureaucratic procedures such as presenting honor guard to arriving planes and taking the supplies to downtown warehouses first were not waived?

It is a matter of utter shame that a nation which spends more than 60% of its budget on military has to wait for foreign troops to start relief work. This very army has in the past been used very efficiently to fire at the striking workers, but now there seem to be all the odds in the world against it to come to people's rescue. The simple fact is that the whole social system is geared against the people cannot be expected to work for the people.

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Appalled though we are at the callousness of the Government, we feel that our criticism should not be at the expense of our contribution to the relief work. The calamity is not over yet. The survivors will need a sustained help for about a year. Our appeal for funds would be superfluous because Pakistanis in North America do not have to wait for anybody's appeal; they all responded spontaneously and very warmly. But we would like to emphasize that the belated improvement in the relief work, Government's long term plan for resettlement, and the election victory of the popular parties should be no cause for complacency. The situation is still very serious and it requires further sacrifices from us. Never has the country been faced with such a disaster since a million people sacrificed their lives for creating Pakistan. The cyclone should be on our mind till every trace of this tragedy has been wiped out.

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